

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Program in Strengthening Village Governance Capacity and Promoting Regional Development in Asahan Regency

Jhon Simon¹, Siswati Saragi², Tomy Jaffisa³, Sabrina Aulia Rahmah⁴

^{1,2,3}Public Administration, Dharmawangsa University, Indonesia

⁴Information Technology, Dharmawangsa University, Indonesia

Email: jhon.somon07@dharmawangsa.ac.id

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ABSTRACT:

Sustainable village development requires competent human resources who can adapt to evolving policies and technologies. Competency gaps often pose significant barriers to effective village governance. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program emerges as a strategic solution to address these challenges by offering village officials the opportunity to gain formal recognition for the skills and experiences acquired through their professional roles. Asahan Regency, a rapidly developing region, continues to face challenges in strengthening the capacity of human resources involved in village administration. The success of the RPL program depends on multiple factors, one of which is systematic evaluation to ensure its effectiveness in enhancing the competence of village apparatus and its long term impact on village development. This study focuses on evaluating the RPL program's role in improving the competencies of village officials in Asahan Regency. A qualitative approach was employed using a case study method. Interview data and other sources were analyzed using NVivo Version 12. Findings indicate that the RPL program requires active support from local government, particularly in terms of program outreach and financial assistance. Many community members, especially village officials, remain unaware of the program's existence and continue to question the legitimacy of the certificates issued. The study concludes that active participation from local government is essential in evaluating and improving the RPL program, including providing both moral and financial support.

Keywords: Village Development, Village Apparatus, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Program

Introduction

Sustainable village development requires competent human resources who are capable of adapting to evolving policies and technological

advancements. Village officials play a strategic role in implementing government programs, managing administrative functions, and delivering quality public services. As noted by

Kushanjadani in Indrawati (2025), village governance involves specific duties, authorities, rights, and responsibilities of the village head, which are operationally supported by village apparatus. However, competency gaps often hinder the effectiveness of village governance. Strengthening the capacity of village officials is a critical component in achieving effective and sustainable development at the local level.

Indrawati (2025) identifies several key barriers to public service delivery in village government, including: a) Organizational structure, b) Apparatus capability, and c) Service delivery systems. Agusta (2017) emphasizes that improving the quality of village officials is not solely the responsibility of the government, but also of the officials themselves. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program offers a strategic solution to these challenges by providing village officials with the opportunity to gain formal recognition for the skills and experiences they have acquired through their work. RPL serves as an approach to acknowledge prior learning and competencies, thereby streamlining the process of skill enhancement.

Natsir (2022) further explains that the RPL program aims to encourage Indonesians to dedicate more time to learning and improving their qualifications, enabling them to better position themselves within society, the workforce, and the business sector.

RPL has been implemented in various regions with the goal of accelerating knowledge transfer and ensuring that village officials possess the

skills required to meet development demands. However, the success of RPL implementation varies across regions, influenced by factors such as local government policies, institutional readiness, and the level of engagement from village officials.

Despite its potential to improve village apparatus competence, the RPL program requires thorough evaluation to assess its effectiveness, particularly within the context of village governance and regional development. In addition to technical and administrative challenges, social factors also play a role in determining the program's success. Continuous evaluation is needed, especially regarding the conversion of academic credits.

Trapsilawati's (2019) study on the RPL program at Universitas Gadjah Mada highlights the need for improvements in assessment methods. Evaluators reported that the assessment process was complex due to the volume of documentation required and the manual nature of the evaluation procedures.

Moreover, village officials' perceptions of RPL, support from local governments, and the availability of infrastructure to facilitate program implementation are critical aspects to consider in evaluating RPL. It is also important to address emerging concerns that RPL may be perceived as a shortcut for individuals unwilling to pursue conventional higher education, seeking degree recognition solely for career advancement (Natsir, 2022).

The title of this research is also aligned with the following research roadmap:



Figure 1. Roadmap Of The RPL Program

Asahan Regency, a rapidly developing region, faces ongoing challenges in strengthening the capacity of human resources involved in village governance. In this context, the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) holds significant potential to enhance the quality of public services and village administrative management. The success of this program depends on multiple factors, one of which is the presence of systematic evaluation to ensure its effectiveness in improving the competencies of village officials and its long-term impact on rural development. Accordingly, this study focuses on evaluating the RPL program in enhancing the competencies of village apparatus in Asahan Regency, identifying the challenges encountered during implementation, and providing strategic recommendations to improve the program's sustainability in supporting village development.

In recent years, the Indonesian government has intensified efforts to professionalize village governance through various capacity-building initiatives, including formal education, technical training, and certification programs. However, these initiatives often face limitations in accessibility, especially for village officials who are already engaged in full-time administrative duties. The RPL program offers a flexible and inclusive alternative by recognizing experiential learning and prior competencies, thereby bridging the gap between informal expertise and formal qualifications (Natsir, 2022). This approach aligns with global trends in adult education and lifelong learning, which emphasize the value of workplace-based knowledge in formal credentialing systems.

Despite its conceptual strengths, the implementation of RPL in rural governance settings presents several challenges. Many village officials remain unaware of the program's existence or are skeptical about the legitimacy of the certificates issued through RPL pathways (Trapsilawati, 2019). Inadequate socialization, limited funding, and the absence of clear regulatory frameworks at the local level further hinder program uptake. Moreover, the manual and document-heavy nature of the assessment

process has been cited as a barrier by evaluators, who often struggle to validate diverse forms of experiential learning within rigid academic structures. These issues underscore the need for institutional support, streamlined procedures, and robust policy integration to ensure the program's credibility and effectiveness.

Given these complexities, a systematic evaluation of the RPL program is essential to inform future policy directions and implementation strategies. This study contributes to that effort by examining the RPL program in Asahan Regency a region undergoing rapid administrative and developmental transformation. Through a qualitative case study approach, the research explores how RPL influences the competencies of village officials, identifies barriers to effective implementation, and assesses the program's potential to support sustainable village development. The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and local governments seeking to strengthen human resource capacity in rural governance.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies simultaneously to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program for village apparatus in Asahan Regency. This approach was selected for its ability to capture measurable empirical dimensions through quantitative data, while also exploring the depth of meaning and contextual nuances through qualitative data.

The analysis is conducted using a thematic approach to identify patterns and challenges emerging during program implementation. Accordingly, this research is expected to provide concrete recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the RPL program in Asahan Regency.

Data collection techniques include questionnaires, interviews, focus group

discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. The population of this study consists of 50 village officials in Asahan Regency who are enrolled as RPL students. Given that the population is fewer than 100 individuals, a total sampling technique—also known as saturated sampling—is applied, meaning the entire population is included as the sample (Arikunto, 2016). Thus, the total sample size for this study is 50 participants. As the participants are distributed across different villages, the sample allocation is divided into three villages, with 16 and 17 participants respectively.

Key informants for the in depth interviews include:

1. Subdistrict Secretary (1 person)
2. Village Heads (6 persons)
3. Head of the Community and Village Empowerment Division (Kabid PMD) of Asahan (1 person)

4. Section Head of PMD Asahan (Kasie PMD) (1 person)

5. Chairperson of the Indonesian Village Government Association (PPDI) of Asahan (1 person)

For the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method, the invited participants include:

1. Village apparatus enrolled in the RPL program (10 individuals)
2. Community representatives (2 individuals)
3. Village heads (6 individuals)

The data and information collected were processed using NVivo version 12 and subsequently analyzed to address the research questions formulated in this study. The procedural steps of the research are illustrated in the following figure.

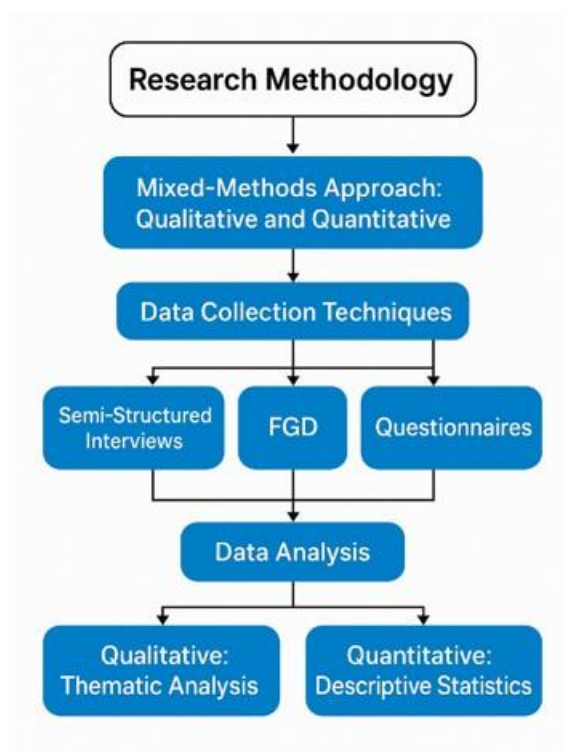


Figure 2. Research Methodology

Result

The distributed questionnaire yielded tabulated data as follows:

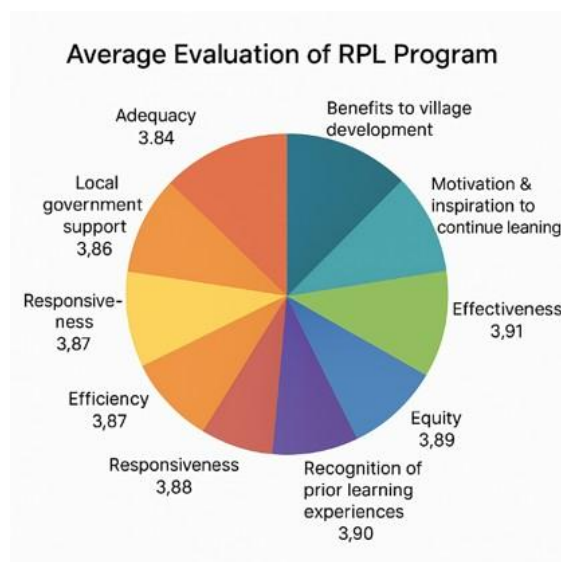


Figure 3. Average Evolution Of RPL Program

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on the data presented above, the RPL program has been implemented effectively and aligns well with the needs of village officials. The curriculum and instructional materials provided are perceived as supportive in helping village apparatus fulfill their administrative duties and contribute to village development. However, the efficiency score of 3.87 (high) indicates a need for closer attention to the alignment between program costs and the services received. Similarly, the adequacy score of 3.84 suggests that while the program is generally sufficient in achieving its objectives, there remains room for improvement in optimizing resource allocation and outcome delivery. Source: Interview Data Processed Using NVivo Version 12 The qualitative analysis yielded insights across two key dimensions: effectiveness and efficiency.

Effectiveness

Respondents consistently affirmed that the RPL program aligns with its intended goals. The following themes emerged:

- Providing educational opportunities for village officials
- Supporting village development initiatives
- Enhancing the quality of human resources and public service delivery

- Improving knowledge and practical skills among village apparatus
- Overall, the RPL program is perceived to have successfully met its objectives

Efficiency

In terms of efficiency—defined as the alignment between program costs and the benefits received—participants generally expressed satisfaction. However, several suggestions were made to improve financial accessibility and learning support:

- Tuition fees are considered reasonable relative to the benefits and facilities provided
- The blended learning model (face-to-face and Zoom sessions) is viewed as cost-effective
- Flexible payment options (installments) and relatively low tuition costs are appreciated
- No significant complaints were reported by participants regarding financial or logistical aspects

Adequacy

The RPL program is perceived as sufficiently meeting the needs of its intended target group. Interview responses highlighted the following points:

- Additional support in terms of facilities and equipment is still needed
- The program contributes to strengthening public service delivery, creativity, and responsiveness to community needs
- It enhances the quality of human resources among village officials
- RPL is instrumental in achieving optimal village service outcomes

Accuracy of Targeting

This dimension assesses whether the program has accurately reached its intended participants and objectives. Key findings include:

- The program has potential to be expanded to include non-apparatus youth to further support village development
- It is appropriately targeted at village officials to improve human resource quality
- The program aligns with regional development demands and local needs

Equity

Equity refers to the inclusiveness of the RPL program in reaching eligible participants. Interview data revealed the following:

- Participants must be prepared to balance work and study commitments
- The program is open to all qualified village officials
- No restrictions or discriminatory selection practices were reported

Responsiveness

Responsiveness reflects the program's adaptability to evolving needs, including learning methods and curriculum relevance. The following themes emerged:

- Learning materials are current and relevant, including digital content
- Case-based learning and flexible scheduling are employed

- The program is responsive to the changing needs of RPL participants

Insights from Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The FGD provided valuable perspectives on the implementation and perceived impact of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program, particularly in the context of village governance and community development.

Effectiveness

The RPL program is widely regarded as effective by stakeholders, including Mr. M. Guntur Gunawan Damanik, Chair of the Indonesian Village Apparatus Association (PPDI) for Asahan Regency. He emphasized that the knowledge gained through the program has directly supported village officials in improving public services and decision-making processes:

"The RPL program has proven effective because the knowledge acquired by participants helps them contribute to village development. For example, they now understand what constitutes good public service, and they have theoretical frameworks to support practical decision-making."

Expectations for Government Support

Despite its effectiveness, participants expressed a shared expectation for more tangible involvement from local governments (Nasution, 2022). Key suggestions included:

- Provision of financial assistance or learning facilities for village officials pursuing higher education
- Broader dissemination of the RPL program to reach eligible individuals beyond current participants
- Expansion of access to include non-apparatus youth in remote areas, to foster inclusive development

A student participant from a remote village shared:

"Thankfully, tuition can be paid in installments, so we can still breathe. Our salaries as village

officials are much lower than civil servants. We're grateful, but we hope the local government can help. We come from underprivileged areas, and we joined this program with determination because we want to give back to our region. If possible, there should be a policy to support tuition fees so that youth in our village can also improve their knowledge and help our region progress."

Challenges in Program Dissemination

The dissemination of the RPL program remains limited. According to a subdistrict secretary:

"We've only informed village officials that the RPL program exists and that they're welcome to join if interested. It's like saying, 'If you want to study, go ahead.' We can't force anyone. But we believe this program is excellent—it helps our officials become more competent in their duties."

The limited outreach is attributed to the absence of a formal policy framework guiding program promotion. Although the legal basis for RPL is established through **Law No. 20 of 2023** and **Ministerial Regulation No. 41 of 2021**, there is currently no specific policy mandating or regulating its socialization.

Conclusion

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This study highlights several weaknesses in the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Program. A key issue is the limited public understanding of the RPL concept, leading to the misconception that RPL is a pathway to obtaining a degree without attending formal classes. Additionally, local government efforts to disseminate information about the program have been insufficient, both among village officials and the general public. The RPL Program also lacks standardized guidelines for teaching and learning processes, allowing institutions to apply varying approaches and creating uncertainty for participants.

Recommendation

Greater involvement from local governments is essential, including financial support, provision of facilities, and comprehensive dissemination of information about the RPL Program. Furthermore, a policy framework should be established not only to regulate the RPL mechanism uniformly, but also to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the learning conversion process. This is crucial to prevent the perception that RPL is merely a shortcut to obtaining a degree without formal education.